

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for printing an image onto a food item, the apparatus comprising:

at least one cassette including a recess corresponding to ~~[[a]]variable size and shaped~~dimensions of the food item in order to receive the food item therein;

a directing tray for receiving the at least cassette;

a guide mechanism for receiving the directing tray, guiding the directing tray in a first direction, and maintaining a planar height of the directing tray; and

a printing device that is moveable only within a plane at a fixed height above the directing tray, for printing an image onto the food item,

wherein a depth of the recess of the at least one cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned a predetermined optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette is positioned below the printing device.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising a computer for receiving an image and for controlling the printing device such that the received image is printed onto the food item.

24. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising a motor

including a motor shaft for providing a rotational movement to move the directing tray in the first direction.

25. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the guide mechanism comprises a gear for engaging a rack attached to ~~a bottom surface of~~ the directing tray, the gear using the rotational movement of the motor to move the directing tray in the first direction.

26. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 25, wherein the directing tray comprises a pair of flanges that flank the gear and rack for preventing lateral displacement between the gear and the rack.

27. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein the guide mechanism comprises two gears spaced axially apart for engaging two racks attached to ~~a bottom surface of~~ the directing tray, the two gears using the rotational movement of the motor to move the directing tray in the first direction.

28. (Cancelled)

29. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 21, further comprising at least one other cassette including another recess corresponding to ~~[[a]]variable size—and shaped~~dimensions of another food item in order to receive the another food item therein.

30. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 29, wherein a depth of the recess of the at least one cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned an optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette and the at least one other cassette is positioned below the printing device, and

wherein a depth of the another recess of the at least one other cassette is determined based upon a thickness of the another food item, such that a top surface of the another food item is positioned the optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the at least one cassette and the at least one other cassette is positioned below the printing device.

31. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 21, wherein the printing device prints the image onto the food item using edible ink or edible food dye.

32. (Currently Amended) A method for printing an image onto a food item using a printing apparatus including a directing tray, a guide mechanism, and a printing device, the method comprising:

selecting ~~a size and shape~~dimensions of the food item;

designing a cassette for supporting the food item including a recess corresponding to the ~~size and shape~~dimensions of the food item in order to receive the food item therein;

receiving, by the cassette, the food item;

receiving, by the directing tray, the cassette, the directing tray being capable of receiving a plurality of cassettes;

receiving, by the guide mechanism, the directing tray;

guiding, by the guide mechanism, the directing tray in a first direction while maintaining a planar height of the directing tray; and

printing, by the printing device, the image onto the food item as the directing tray passes under the printing device in the first direction, the printing device being moveable only within a plane at a fixed height above the directing tray,

wherein designing the cassette for supporting the food item comprises determining a depth of the recess of the cassette based upon a thickness of the food item, such that a top surface of the food item is positioned a predetermined optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving is positioned below the printing device.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 32, further comprising:
receiving an image in a computer; and
controlling the printing device such that the received image is printed onto the food item.

34. (Cancelled)

35. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim ~~[[34]]~~32, further comprising:
selecting ~~a size and shape~~dimensions of another food item;
designing another cassette for supporting the another food item including a recess corresponding to the ~~size and shape~~dimensions of the another food item in order to receive the another food item therein;
receiving, by the another cassette, the another food item; and
receiving, by the directing tray, the another cassette,
wherein designing the another cassette for supporting the another food item comprises determining a depth of the recess of the another cassette based upon a thickness of the another food item, such that a top surface of the another food item is positioned the optimal distance from the printing device when the directing tray receiving the another cassette is positioned below the printing device.

36. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 32, further comprising:
selecting ~~a size and shape~~dimensions of another food item;
designing another cassette for supporting the another food item including a recess corresponding to the ~~size and shape~~dimensions of the another food item in order to receive the another food item therein;
receiving, by the another cassette, the another food item; and
receiving, by the directing tray, the another cassette.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 32, wherein printing, by the printing device, the image onto the food item comprises moving the printing device in a second direction and a third direction within the plane, the second and the third directions being perpendicular to the first direction, in order to linearly apply the image to onto the food item as the directing tray is moved in the first direction below the printing device.

38. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 32, wherein the image is printed onto the food item using edible ink or edible food dye.

39. (New) The apparatus of Claim 25, wherein the rack is attached to a bottom surface of the directing tray.